

COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA
Office of the Governor



Timothy M. Kaine
Governor

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**GOVERNOR KAINE DECLARES APRIL AS ‘VIRGINIA
GREEN TRAVEL MONTH’**

*~ Challenges tourism industry to recruit 40 new partners for designation as
green destinations ~*

McLean—With Virginia marking the 40th anniversary of the “*Virginia is for Lovers*” marketing campaign and environmentalists the world over looking forward to Earth Day 2009, Governor Timothy M. Kaine today declared April as “Virginia Green Travel Month.” Highlighting the Virginia Tourism Corporation’s work encouraging improved energy practices, Governor Kaine also challenged the Virginia tourism industry to recruit 40 new partners for certification through its “*Virginia Green*” program as a green destination. As part of Virginia Green Travel Month, the state tourism office will highlight green travel packages, green getaways and spotlight *Virginia Green* travel options statewide. The Governor made the announcement at the Ritz-Carlton, Tysons Corner, one of the more than 200 *Virginia Green* certified hotels.

“*Virginia Green* helps preserve and protect Virginia’s natural environment, which is one of our greatest tourism attractions,” Governor Kaine said. “It also helps support our economy, as research shows that travelers who are passionate about protecting the environment are more willing to patron businesses that are working to reduce their environmental impact.”

Virginia Green is a statewide partnership between the Virginia Tourism Corporation, Virginia Department of Environmental Quality and the Virginia Hospitality and Travel Association. DEQ awards *Virginia Green* certification to tourism businesses that commit to waste-reducing activities such as recycling, optional linen service, water

and energy conservation, green cleaning, purchasing eco-friendly products and other steps that help reduce harmful environmental effects. Participants of the program, which launched in pilot phase in 2006, self-certify that they are meeting the program's requirements, and encourage active consumer feedback to ensure that facilities live up to commitments and become even greener over time.

To date there are approximately 450 Virginia Green certified tourism partners statewide.

The host of today's announcement, the Ritz-Carlton, Tysons Corner, has reduced its solid waste by 60%, averaging 20 tons a month in food composting and averaging 28 tons a month in recycling of plastic, glass, metal cans, cardboard and paper.

Facilities that qualify for Virginia Green certification are realizing significant savings in operating costs. For example, the Virginia Beach Convention Center, the first *Virginia Green* certified convention center in the Commonwealth, reported a cost savings of more than \$204,000 between February 2008 and January 2009 through conservation and energy efficiency. The facility experienced a 22% reduction in power costs, a 40% decrease in gas costs, and a 23% decrease in water usage.

"By conserving energy and reducing our costs, we are better able to serve our community and meeting planners," said Courtney Dyer, Virginia Beach Convention Center General Manager. "The Convention Center's commitment to the environment is not only a preferred amenity, but more frequently a requirement for meeting planners looking to book their conventions. Recent trends in the tourism and hospitality industry indicate that clients are very interested in doing business with environmentally conscious organizations."

Tourism is one of Virginia's most powerful industries, generating \$19 billion in revenue, supporting 210,000 jobs and providing \$1.2 billion in state and local taxes for Virginia communities.

"The intent of the Virginia Green travel program is to move a very large industry towards greener practices that benefit the environment, their customers and ultimately their businesses," said Alisa Bailey, President and CEO of the Virginia Tourism Corporation. "These practices are a first step in ensuring the sustainability of our industry."

Visit www.viriniagreentravel.org for a complete list of Virginia Green certified lodging properties, restaurants, attractions and more. The site also has convenient links to Virginia state parks, outdoor adventure programs, the Virginia Birding and Wildlife Trail, eco-friendly events, green getaways and travel tips. Or call 1-800-VISITVA to request a free Virginia is for Lovers – Live Passionately travel guide.